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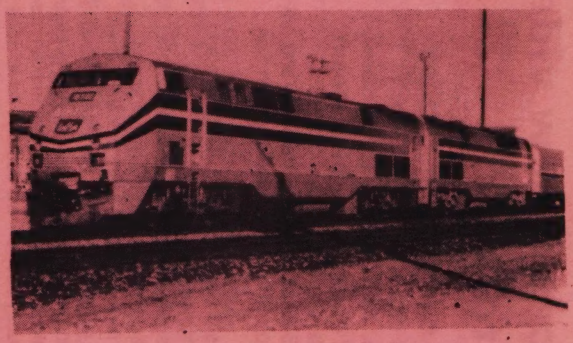

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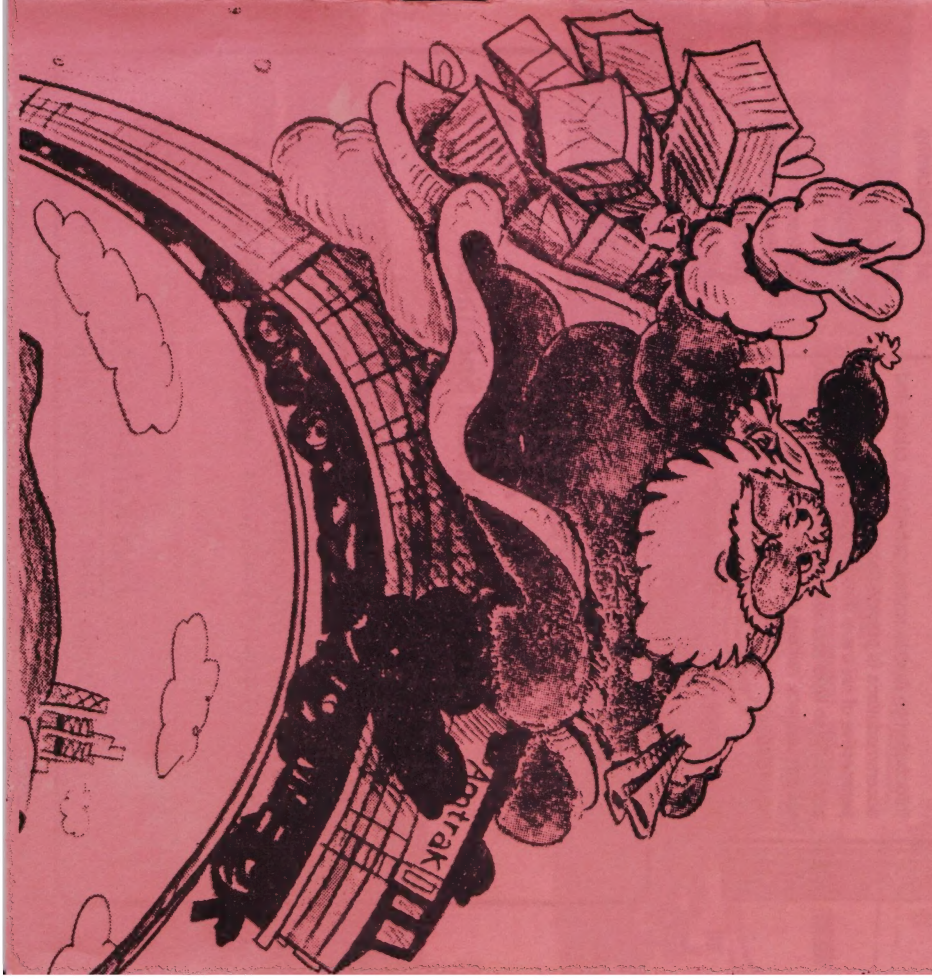

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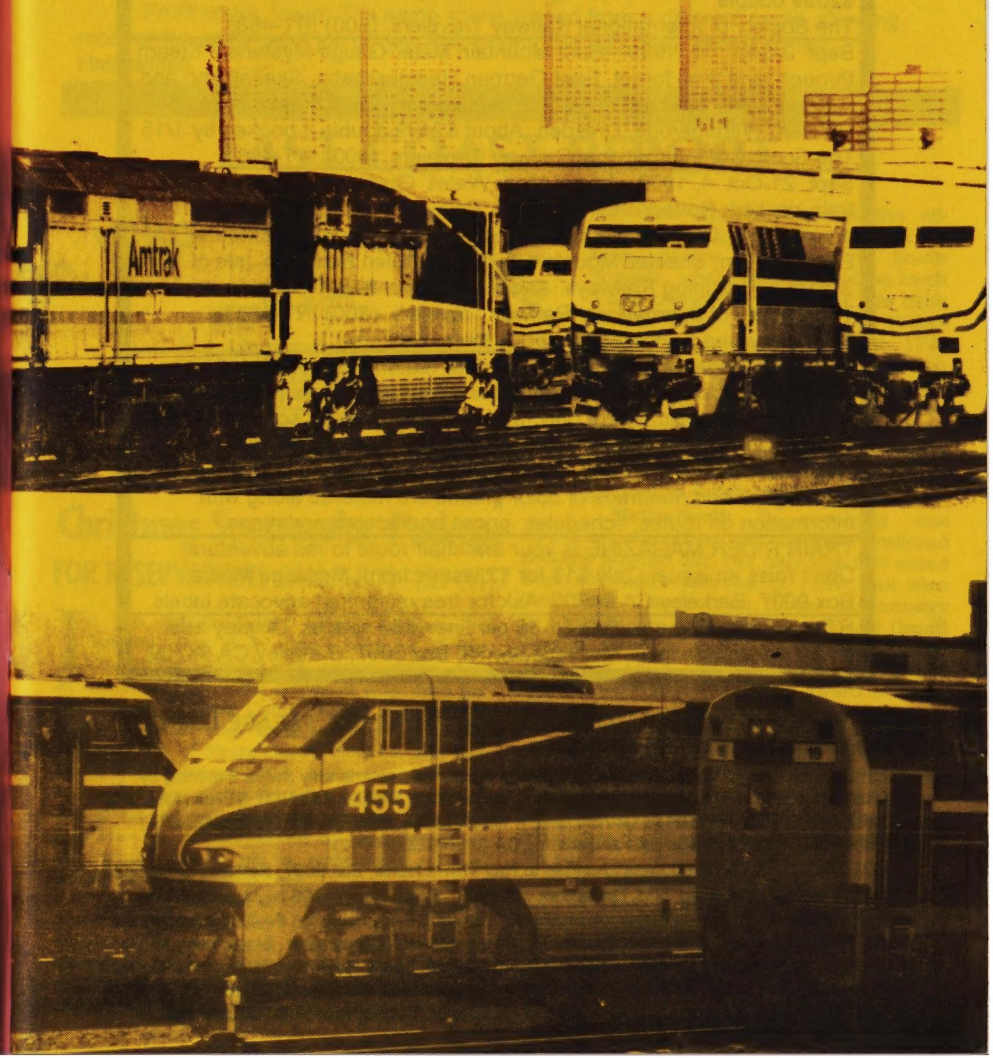
DECEMBER 19, 1998



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STAFF: James Russell, Editor. Editors-at-Large: Glenn Lee & Paul Rayton. Regional Correspondents: Peter Bretz, Jack Ferry, Adron Hall, Kenneth Maylath, Peter Roehm. RTN ADVERTISING RATES: Express Ads $1.50/line of 80 spaces. Display ads $1.50/square inch.

ON THE COVER

Rear cover: Car 7104 of the "Mt. Hood" Talgo trainset photographed at Portland OR on Nov 30 by Rocky Shay. This is a baggage car and sports the big "Batman" fins that make a visual transition to the height of whatever locomotive or cab control car might be coupled behind it. The occasion for photography here was the inaugural run of the Cascades Talgos, about which Rocky Shay reports in this issue.

Front cover, upper: As seen in Chicago on Sep 12, Amtrak F59 locomotive 455 (second from left) is in the company of more-traditional Amtrak engines as it waits to be transported to Southern California for eventual use in the Las Vegas service, after use on the *San Diegans*. The engine is dressed in attractive blue and white paint with a broad swept-up blue stripe that appears designed to match a similar stripe on a new finned Talgo car that might couple behind it.

Front cover, lower: The same scene viewed from a different angle, showing more of the spiffy paint job of new F59 locomotive 455. Both photos by Bill Hakkarinen.

EAST COAST REPORT

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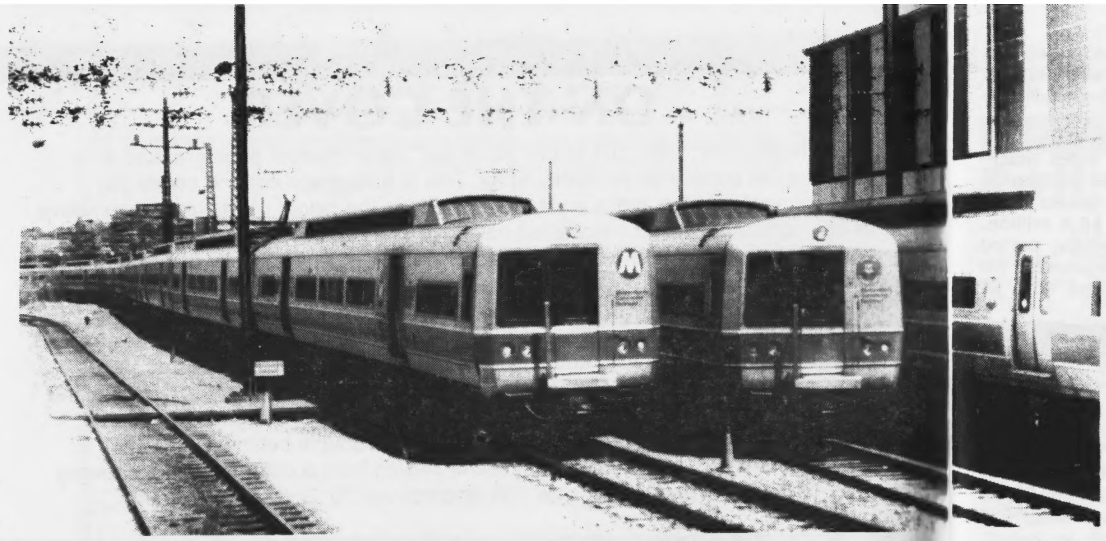
In the unseasonably warm weather of Sunday, Dec 6 it didn't feel as if the Christmas season was approaching, but at Union Station, New Haven it was time for the fourth annual Candy Cane Express to make another run. Each year through the cooperation of Metro-North, Amtrak and the Conn DOT, about 120 children suffering from diseases of the blood or other cancers are given a train ride and receive presents and snacks. Accompanied by their families, the group made up a good-sized crowd aboard the decorated cars.

The consist of the special train was Shore Line East/CT DOT GP40 #6697 with a wreath on the nose, followed by SPV coaches 1629, 1627, 1631, rest room-equipped cab cars 1673, 1671, 1675 and cab/lounge 1001. The train left New Haven just after 2pm and made the all-important stop at Milford to pick up Santa before continuing to South Norwalk, where the train sat on track 3 and changed ends for the run back to New Haven, following the Metro-North local as well as Amtrak 174. The train arrived back in New Haven about 4:10 and there were nothing but smiles on the faces of the passengers and volunteers as they detrained. Another train is planned for next year, on the first Sunday in December.—Bob Underwood.

Metro-North is receiving one award after another, the commuter railroad proudly pointed out. Not only was M-N voted best commuter railroad in 1998, but also New York Construction News, an industry publication, voted the revitalization of Grand Central Terminal as the 1998 Project of the Year, and PECK Drawbridge and Bridgeport Viaduct were selected as the Award of 1998 Bridge Project of the Year.

To ensure that enough staff were available to make head counts of all trains operating on New Year's Eve, Metro-North asked 11 management employees to volunteer for the counts between 2pm and 7pm, promising them an alternate day off if they did so.

Metro-North's on-time performance goal for 1998 is 96.5%, and as of Dec 13 it stood at 96.6%. For the week ended Dec 13, on-time perf of the Harlem Line was 98.8%, the Hudson Line 97.2% and the New Haven Line 95.7%.



Metro-North electric MU trainsets are seen laying over at the New Haven CT Amtrak station on Sat., Aug 8, 1998. Metro-North provides commuter service into New York's Grand Central Terminal from New Haven on Amtrak's NE Corridor line, and this is one of M-N's busiest routes. The electrification of this line, originally installed by the New Haven RR in the 1930s, currently ends at this point; however, it is being extended northward into Boston. When this project is completed in 2000, new Amtrak American Flyer equipment capable of 150mph will begin service between Boston and Washington DC, 457 miles. Photo & caption by Alex Mayes.

On a visit to New Haven Union Station on Oct 16 I asked for and was given a copy of the new Amtrak Northeast timetable effect-ive Oct 25. Most trains are on a schedule close to the previous ones they were on. One major change is that train 178 runs to Boston via Hartford and Springfield, arriving Boston at 3:40am. It does not stop at Back Bay. The last train via the Shore Line is train 176. Trains 66 and 76 now have a "note 3" at Providence. Both trains depart there at 6am, but 66 arrives at 5:10am, while 76 arrives at 5:25am. The trains always had a long stop here, but there was no note to call attention to it, and I'm sure there have been plenty of surprised Providence-bound passengers.

NJ Transit had to re-issue the Morris & Essex timetable effective Sep 9 through Oct 24 because of a typo on page 20 in the station listing column. The revised timetable is printed in black ink.

Track 5 in New Haven Union Station has been renumbered track 2. Non-platform old track 2 had earlier been removed in order to make room for new catenary bridge footings. This is the fifth track to be renumbered.

On Nov 23, New Haven Union Station had piles of the Amtrak "Turkey Timetables" out for the taking. On the 21st they had been nowhere to be found. Metro-North issued separate Turkey Timetables for the Harlem, Hudson and New Haven lines. Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, was bargain day, as all trains were off-peak.—Bob Underwood.

Just about everything that's wrong with NY subway riders can be cured by the MTA's doing the following, according to letter writer Joan Baum of Queens in the NY Times of Dec 24: provide turnstile swipe machines that work at rush hour in fewer than five tries; make train announcements that advise riders that "another train is directly behind this one" after the door has closed; and provide maps that can be read by people over 40. Ms. Baum says there is no "odd neurological disorder" that a Times writer claimed caused subway riders to crowd near the doors rather than moving farther into the car; the riders do that because if they don't they may never get out of the train at their stop. She also comments that the "removal of poles in many trains has only heightened the reliance on doors (and people) to hang on to".

Light rail service between Baltimore's Penn Station and the BWI Airport was doubled on Dec 13, with trains now running every 17 minutes.

The New Hampshire DOT is proposing a plan to reinstate passenger rail service. According to the plan rail service would be restored from Boston to Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford, Manchester and the Manchester airport. New Hampshire would pay for the trains, the MBTA would run them and the federal government would cover the costs of new stations and improvements. The DOT hopes to show the federal government that rail service would reduce auto emissions.—Craig O'Connell.

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, Amtrak and Guilford Rail Systems Inc. signed an accord on Dec. 4 agreeing to rail speeds of 79 mph. on the Boston to Portland, ME route. The question of whether or not passenger trains will be allowed to run on the existing 115 lb. rail is still before the Surface Transportation Board. A decision by the board favorable to Amtrak is expected soon. Amtrak already has been running trains at 79 mph on other routes for years but Guilford challenged this as unsafe. The agreement signed on Dec. 4th means that Guilford will live with the STB decision. Construction of the line is expected to start in March, with service tentatively slated to begin in the summer of 2000 between Boston's North Station and Portland.—Craig O'Connell.

Washington Metro general manager Richard White is proposing a return in part to the use of private contractors to keep its escalators in good shape, and the transit agency will install sensors at the top and bottom of all its escalators to try to avoid a tragic incident like the strangulation death of a woman whose clothing caught in a station escalator on Thanksgiving Day. A sensor would stop the escalator if an object jammed it. There are already sensors in a little over 10% of Metro's escalators, but the agency will step up its installation program. Also, the Metro board discussed placing canopies over outside escalator entrances to reduce wear from weather. If escalator breakdown were reduced, more of Metro's repairmen would be available to install sensors. Metro is short of mechanics because it pays much lower wages than private industry. Already four people have died from strangulation in Metro escalators. Said GM White, "None of us can afford to live with this situation".

Virginia Railway Express last year ran a Santa Claus train on its Manassas line, and because of its popularity ran one also on the Fredericksburg line this December. Actually, there were two 10-car trains on each line on Dec 12, sponsored by VRE, CSX and local police and sheriffs. They were by all accounts a great success, with a total of 4000 children riding the free trains. The Fredericksburg trains ran to the Possum Point Power Station and return. Besides good public relations for the commuter agency, the occasion saw distribution of Operation Lifesaver safety coloring books.

Three round trips daily may be added to VRE's Manassas-Washington line in fiscal 2000, executive director Steve Roberts said Dec 2. The off-peak runs would be geared to tourists wanting to spend a day in Manassas and return to Washington the same day. One would leave Manassas or Broad Run at 9 or 9:30am for Washington, then return. One would leave Washington at 1:30pm to Manassas and then return. A third would run from Washington at 3:30pm. Officials believe the new service would pay for itself. No similar expansion is planned for the Fredericksburg line, which already is covered by other Amtrak trains.

Manassas plans to spruce up its downtown city square and include a new pavilion. If this is done, parking areas for VRE and other cars will be re-arranged.

Light rail line plan between Bethesda and Silver Spring MD was revived Dec 10 when the Montgomery County Council voted to request the state to finish an environmental report on the 4-mile proposed line. The line, which would bisect exclusive neighborhoods, would connect the two arms of the Washington Metro's Red Line and connect two rapidly-growing employment areas.

The line would cost $250 million to build. However, the cost of the environmental review would have to come from money that the county executive wants to use to begin planning a "Purple Line", a $15 billion project to provide a rail line outside the Beltway and roughly paralleling it.

The Washington Metro will add trains on Dec 28 because of a 5.5% ridership increase the system recorded in FY 98. Two 6-car trains will go on the Orange Line at 6-min headways Vienna-Arlington-downtown Washington between 9 and 9:30am, and two trains 6-6:30pm in the opposite direction. Four trains will go on 9-9:40am at 3-min headways Glenmont-Shady Grove on the Red Line. The Green Line will get one train added 6-6:30pm; and trains will be enlarged to six cars on the Green Line shortcut between Greenbelt and Farragut North in morning and evening peak periods. These schedules are for weekdays only.

The 1998 NEC Thanksgiving program produced improved results over the same period last year. From 11/23/ thru 11/30, In Station Ticket Sales were up 4% with revenue up 8%. Mechanical Bad Order ratio was at its lowest levels enabling the NEC to offer 18,000 additional seats with the assistance of leased equipment, which resulted in 30% fewer standees this year.

The Empire Service Product Line had the most significant jump in On Time Performance with a November result of 81.9% as opposed to the previous month's 72%. Top OTP performer in November was the Philadelphia Product Line with 92.5%. NortheastDirect reported 89.8% and Metroliners reported 89.1%.

In November for the first time Quick Track Automated Ticket Sales machines generated in excess of $8 million in revenue. Just over 165,000 tickets were issued, which earned just over $8.6 million. For the just-completed Thanksgiving period in the NEC, Quick Track sales accounted for 21.5% of all in-station sales and 41% of credit card sales.

MIDWEST REPORT

Amtrak has been operating the *Illini* now for some weeks with a 72-seat Amfleet II in the new phase-4 paint scheme in both trainsets. Another source reports that some of the Horizon fleet cars are being refurbished and being assigned to the hub trains in Chicago. The exterior car sides sport the new Phase 4 type graphics and striping. Car interiors have green-colored seats replacing the original seats when the cars were new in 1989 and 1990. Gray style colored carpeting is on the floors. The biggest improvement is that now just below the window line are 110 volt outlets for use by passengers for their electronic toys. These outlets are in every row of seats.

City of Chicago has filed a motion with the Surface Transportation Board, asking the board to disapprove the merger of Illinois Central into Canadian National until the St. Charles Air Line is demolished. The city claims that the elevated line divides neighborhoods, creates a blighted area, and is a serious burden to area redevelopment. The city cites a new park being constructed just south of Chinatown, which will be divided in two by the line.

The St. Charles Air Line connects IC's main line into Chicago from New Orleans with the former BN and Santa Fe lines of the BNSF; Wisconsin Central; Soo; and UP's former C&NW. The line currently carries an average of 17 freight trains and four Amtrak trains daily.

●●●

The *Texas Eagle*, #21 through Texas on Dec 16 carried a total of 29 cars, a near record. The three locomotives (#60, 313, 377) were not able to make running time, resulting in about 30 minutes of additional delay between Little Rock, AR. and Longview, TX. The train was 3 hours late at Longview, with 2.5 hours of that delay occurring north of Little Rock. Despite being out of the dispatching "window," the train was delayed only twice for meets between Little Rock and Longview, 5 minutes at Traskwood and 9 minutes at Witherspoon – a significant achievement by UP dispatchers in view of the train's tardy operation.–Texas Eagle Advocates.

Amtrak has made the triweekly CHI-LAX through cars on the *Eagle/Sunset Limited* permanent. An ARROW message was issued Dec 15, stating in part:

The through cars were initially scheduled to operate through May 31, 1999 only. Effective immediately, the through car operation is permanent, and this coach and sleeper space is in ARROW through the end of inventory.

The tri-weekly through cars continue to be augmented by the weekly *Texas Eagle* which runs by itself all the way from Chicago to Los Angeles, making all *Texas Eagle* schedules a total of four days a week. Credit is due the many rail passenger advocates along the route of the *Texas Eagle*. Ridership continues to be strong on this train, which Amtrak had scheduled for extinction in 1997.

State of Illinois has announced state grants totaling $7.5 million for a new Metra station and access roads to serve the north Glenview IL area. The project is in conjunction with the redevelopment planned for the demilitarized Glenview Naval Air Station. Metra plans to begin building the new station in spring, 1999. It will be located about a mile north of the current Metra/Amtrak station in Glenview.

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency has contributed $2 million to reconstruction of the burned-out Pullman Company office building. The structure and its historic clock tower were destroyed in a fire set by a transient. The move was taken after a consulting firm declared that the building could be reconstructed at an eventual cost of $25 million. Backers hope that the state, which purchased the property with the intent of opening a transportation museum, will fund the major portion of the cost to reconstruct the building.

Anthony Busch, 45, a drunken transient found inside the former Pullman Company administration building while it was on fire, is reported to have said he "heard voices" that told him to start the fire. He is in jail in Chicago, charged with arson. The fire destroyed the historic structure on December 1.

RAIL CANADA

VIA Rail said on Dec 9 that it had retained Hambros Bank, Ltd. of Britain to advise on the possibility of a public stock offering. Peter Gregg of Transport Canada said that VIA is also considering a split into three regional operations. Gregg, in a public statement, said that VIA is looking into "alternative financing", a term which "could include franchising, partial franchising, public-private partnerships, or selling shares to the public." VIA's proposed split into three franchised regional operations would divide the company into Western, Atlantic, and Corridor franchises. Already, Virgin Rail Group of Britain, Stagecoach Holdings of Australia, and Canada's Bombardier have been named in financial circles as possible private franchisees.

VIA Rail and Canadian National are in talks about expanding service in the corridor that serves Windsor, Ontario; Toronto; Montreal; and Quebec City, said Mark Hallman, a spokesman for CN.

During the recent Air Canada strike, VIA Rail saw a ridership increase of nearly 28% in the Corridor, and in the East patronage rose 45% in Economy class and 3% in Easterly class. Said a VIA spokesperson, "The strike brought us long-haul origin-destination traffic, while short distance traffic was down because of capacity limitations." VIA said the strike had only marginal impacts in the West due to travel distances.

VIA Rail ridership through Sep 1998 (latest figures available) showed for year-to-date Corridor down 3.5%, Eastern Transcon down 11.3%, Western Transcon down 0.8% and System (including remotes) down 3.9%. But for the month of Sep, the Corridor was up 6.9%, Eastern Transcon up 0.7%, Western Transcon up 17.2%, and System up 6.9%. For year to date, total system ridership was 2,729,620.

Miscellaneous News Reports

Amtrak films commercials on a non-Amtrak line: Amtrak did filming on the little Fillmore & Western railroad in Southern California on Dec 7. Engine 454 and four Superliner cars were used in filming at the barbecue site, the little red schoolhouse and the Sespe Creek Bridge. Amtrak crews and F&W pilots were used, and F&W engine 4009 (Alco RS32) pulled the train into Fillmore.

Amtrak President Warrington said that the high-speed rail project in the NE is on schedule for an opening in Nov or Dec of 1999.

On Dec 15 in the NE Corridor, all westbound Amtrak and NJ Transit service during the evening commute was subject to 45-60 minute delays due to a broken rail on the Portal Bridge (the one where the Fast Mail was wrecked). Some delays were caused by Amtrak equipment coming in late to Penn Station from Sunnyside Yard, and NJT trains being unable to spot on congested platforms to unload.

Two high speed corridors are being considered in the Southeast. (See also Mixed Train of Thoughts, pp. 17-18.) The first, and original corridor, is the Washington-Richmond-Raleigh-Greensboro-Charlotte Corridor designated under Section 1010, ISTEA of 1991. Under NC Governor Hunt's plan this will be extended to Atlanta (Spartanburg, Greenville, etc), along the route of the *Crescent*, and then down to Macon. But you will not be able to go from Macon (or Atlanta, for that matter) to Florida. The second, which according to newspaper accounts caught officials by surprise, will run from Raleigh to Columbia, Savannah and Jacksonville, the present route of the *Star*. Observers find this route interesting, as NC Sr. Rail Planner, Mark Sullivan, whose brainchild this plan is, presented it at NARP'S Region 5 annual meeting in Fayetteville, NC, March 1995. The topic was, High-Speed Rail in the Southeast. Also represented were Amtrak, the FRA, ABB (as an equipment manufacturer) and CSXT. Jack Martin moderated. Typically, the reporter assigned to cover the panel discussion slipped out early to catch the second half of the UNC-Kentucky NCAA "Sweet-16" playoff game.

The key to the plan (and therefore the public/private aspect) is that CSXT will be the private investor. The plan calls for the joint rebuilding of the existing S line between Petersburg and Norlina (rail now removed, fiber optics in right of way) and running passenger service during the day and early evening and high-speed intermodal late night/early morning.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"Glass with a thin coating of metal may make train rides more peaceful. Pilkington Group Technology in England is selling such glass under the name 'Datastop' for use in train windows. The metal film is thin enough to allow light through, but it blocks radio waves, which means cellular phones won't work aboard the train. Phone-free travel is in demand in England, where passengers have been complaining about having to share their compartments with someone shouting into a phone."

—Stephen Reucroft and John Swain in Science Briefs in the Boston Globe, Nov 2, referencing *Physics Today*, October issue.

URBAN-SUBURBAN TRANSIT

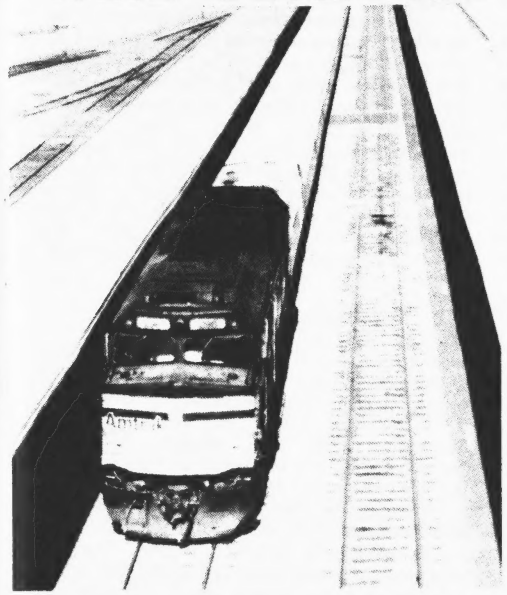
California Transportation Commission on Dec 2 OK'd $38 million in funding to upgrade the former SP tracks between Sacramento and Stockton. The upgrade is needed before Amtrak can begin running a fifth San Joaquin train, which would serve Sacramento directly without a bus connec-tion. CalTrans says some 70,000 people transferred from the existing four San Joaquin trains in each direction last year, to go to/from Sacramento. CalTrans spokesman Jim Drago says the agency forecasts that about 87,000 will use the through train service in its first year.

Caltrain announced on Dec 3 that it has withdrawn two stations from its list of possible stations to close or consolidate as part of a plan for improving travel times. The Broadway Station in Burlingame and the College Park Station in San Jose will no longer be considered for closure as part of Caltrain's Rapid Rail Study. The decision, announced at Caltrain's November board meeting, was made in response to persuasive public input about the importance of the two stations to commuters and students.

The Rapid Rail Study outlines $900 million in improvements to the commuter rail line. Caltrain Project Manager Andy Nash noted that Caltrain will look to the local transit agencies to help fund the cost to upgrade the Broadway and College Park stations, estimated at $10-20 million.

Fort Worth transit authorities have received Federal approval for their plans to construct a new 9th St. passenger station which would serve both their new commuter line and Amtrak. However, from an operational standpoint, this creates problems. Fort Worth is a crew change point, and the location of Amtrak's mechanical department that does the 1,000 mile inspection. The commissary, mail & express, and baggage work is also done at Ft. Worth, for both the current Texas Eagle and the upcoming Oklahoma train. Ft. Worth Transportation Authority doesn't want these so-called "dirty" operations done at 9th street. They have offered Amtrak an abandoned rail yard two miles to the east for these operations. Based on this proposal, a passenger coming through/to Ft. Worth from Dallas and points east/north will have to sit on the train for 30 minutes while the "dirty" operations take place. Then the train pulls into the 9th St. station. Ft. Worth T has proposed an 8-minute station stop to get people on and off the train. Meanwhile, Amtrak's station agents have to haul passenger baggage two miles to the "dirty" operations area because there is not time at 9th St. to load baggage. The proposed track alignment from the 9th St. station to the ex-T&P passenger station will render the current Amtrak (ex-Santa Fe) station tracks useless because the T proposes to raise the grade and run the main track down the existing platform. This is despite the new owners of the current depot who would like to restore the building and have Amtrak remain. Some adjustments could be made to allow the existing station to be used for Amtrak and to do the "dirty" work without inconveniencing the passenger. Further, the Ft. Worth T is constructing the 9th St. Station under the assumption that Greyhound and Amtrak are moving in. But the understanding is that neither has yet committed to such a move. Some more thought needs to go into this, before a major mistake is made.–Texas Assn. of Rail Passengers.

WEST COAST REPORT



Talgo train 751 arrives at Portland OR from Seattle on Sep 14, 1998. The now-elderly F40 locomotive is an interesting contrast to the low-slung leased Talgo equipment. New F59s will eventually power the train.—Bill Hakkarinen.

Planning is still progressing for an auto train-type service on the *Coast Starlight*. It should be starting up in less than a year, with cars being carried between Seattle and Los Angeles (and not intermediate points), the cities that surveys showed would yield the most patronage. Amtrak is obtaining more auto carriers for the service, expecting to operate up to three on the rear of the train. In Seattle, car loading will be done on the north side of King Street Station.

Amtrak West said that customers have filed only 12 refund claims since the *Starlight's* service guarantee was initiated on May 1, 1996. During that time the train has handled 1.4 million passengers. The "Pacific Parlour" cars are very popular with riders.

Caltrain ceremonially received two locomotives at the San Carlos station on Dec 3. One was brand new and the other the first of 20 units being overhauled. The new one, no. 920, was just off the Boise assembly line; nos. 921 and 922 are due before the first Jan. The names of the three will be "Morgan Hill", "San Martin" and "Tamien" respectively. Caltrain is paying Boise Locomotive Co. just under $2 million for each. They join the existing fleet of 20 F40s. The overhauled loco is no. 910 "Millbrae", redone by GEC Alsthom of Montreal. In all, 15 units are being overhauled.

On Dec 2 Caltrain dedicated its newly-renovated Gilroy depot. The original station was built in 1870, when Gilroy was incorporated. In 1917 SP began construction of a bigger station, the only Italian Renaissance-style station remaining on the Central California coast. Caltrain began current commute operations to Gilroy in 1992.

Ski Train problems: Denver's Channel 4 News reported Dec 23 that the Ski Train will probably be canceled for the rest of 1998. The train is spotted at Denver Union Station frozen solid. The temperature has been about 10 below the last couple of nights and the daytime highs have been in the teens. One wonders what might have gone wrong, as the train has certainly operated in extreme cold many times over the years.

The Ski Train began its season Dec 19, but that trip didn't end well. A coal train broke down ahead of the eastbound Ski Train, delaying it for hours. Passengers didn't get back to Denver until well after midnight. Sunday's trip, Dec 20, was canceled because of icing problems.

The train was scheduled for five more December trips: 26th through the 30th, but according to the TV reports, these trips will be canceled unless the temperature rises and thaws the train. Seven below is forecast in Denver for Christmas Eve morning, with slowly rising temps for the following days.—Joe McMillan.

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority says a proposed link between San Jose and BART could be running by 2002. Most of the funding was approved by Santa Clara County voters in 1996 under Measures A and B, which raised the sales tax to the highest in the country. The rail line would connect Caltrain in downtown San Jose with the Union City BART station, with an intermediate stop at the Great Mall in Milpitas.

The linkup is currently by a County Transit bus line which takes 55 minutes to make the trip. The line would use an existing route, Union Pacific's ex-Western Pacific and a former Southern Pacific line which winds through northern San Jose. Running time would be about 39 minutes, according to plans.

The cost of the new rail line would be an estimated $66 million, of which $50 million is already committed from the sales tax funds. An agreement needs to be negotiated with Union Pacific, which runs freight, particularly on the ex-WP line. Transit authorities plan to run 12 daily trains on the line.

WashARP reported that Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, is still pushing for restoration of the *Pioneer* train. At recent committee hearings on Amtrak Board nominees he said that Western Oregon residents and rural Westerners in general live in a "national sacrifice zone". He said that the *Pioneer* was eliminated because of politics when there were other weaker Amtrak routes that we not touched. Said Wyden, "I'm looking for creative approaches to get out of business-as-usual. For example, we have the Olympics coming up in a few years in Salt Lake City. Maybe it's an opportunity..."

The *California Zephyr*, Amtrak Train #5 that left Chicago Dec 21, arrived Salt Lake City 12 hours, 9 minutes late on Dec 23 and was terminated there. Two chartered airplanes transported passengers to Reno and Sacramento. Train #6 due to leave Oakland Dec 24 was annulled between Emeryville and Salt Lake City and originated at Salt Lake City using the equipment off #5(21). Alternate transportation was provided via buses and planes.

California Western Railroad, which runs the famous Skunk trains, went public by issuing its first stock offering in August. The railroad was authorized to sell 614,000 shares at $7.50 per share, with a minimum investment of 100 shares. It also offered a limited-edition commemorative stock certificate for an additional production fee. Info is available from corporate secretary Jan Hogan at 800-236-7422.

Caltrain celebrated the renovation of its 4th & King Sts San Francisco station on Dec 17 with a morning ceremony that included the burial of a time capsule, display of Caltrain's new and refurbished locomotives, dedication of a new bicycle area in memory of bike pioneer "Cap" Thomas, station tours and commemorative items, and a model display of the SF Giants' stadium. (Pacific Bell Park, the new stadium, will be nearby, and will provide Caltrain with new riders.) The station project cost $5. It began in Dec 1997. Still to come are more improvements to the plaza area and sidewalks around the station, due for completion in Mar 1999. Reported Steve Rubenstein in the SF Chronicle, "In the great tradition of railroads, the 11am train pulled out of the station not at 11am but at 11:03am. And in the great tradition of railroads, would-be passenger Jeppe Juhl was dashing to the platform just as the train was pulling out, making him the very first passenger to miss his train at the new station".

San Francisco will free shuttle buses in 1999, from May 15 to Sep 26, connecting the N-Judah light rail line with points in Golden Gate Park. A $137,000 grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District will fund it. Four buses will be used.

San Francisco Muni general manager Emilio Cruz announced Dec 15 that he will leave his job soon to take a more lucrative position with a construction management company. Officials said that the next candidate must have more transit experience than did Cruz, who was appointed by Mayor Willie Brown in 1996, and who had no previous transit experience. Some officials said it will be difficult to find a new qualified person unless Muni is restructured so that the general manager has more authority.

Christmas at Santa Barbara

(Only Amtrak Getting Through)

Ventura siding is blocked with a cut of loaded oil cars. The dispatcher was not aware of this and scheduled a meet with three Amtrak trains at Ventura today. Everything went fine, though, as #578 backed out of the west end of Ventura after the commuter and #14 went west.

This string of oil cars had a hot box late Tuesday night at MP 363 and was set out in the Pacific Block for repair. The bad axle was repaired and the cars moved to Ventura. It's not known when the cars will continue on to LA/Carson for unloading.

The siding Seacliff is blocked with a MOW train of almost 70 cars. The Steel Gang 9001, a UP system dual relay gang, is loaded on the cars and set to depart for Roseville Saturday December 26, when a crew and power arrives. The SP 7535 is sandwiched in the middle of the MOW train and will have to be dug out.

This weekend is the first time since the tie and rail project started several months ago that the Scale Track in Santa Barbara is empty. The Amtrak spur has the ITW 9004 and some gondolas with track material parked on it. Scrap rail is stacked at Ventura and ties are piled west of the Ventura River, west of the siding Seacliff and in the middle of the "old" Santa Barbara Yard.

The surfacing gang will not start up until January 4 is the word I get. They still have a slow order from Carpinteria to Goleta to remove. The slow order is a direct result of the tie and rail project.

A ballast train is parked in the yard at Oxnard awaiting work to resume after the holidays. Only Amtrak has operated through Santa Barbara today.

The siding Capitan is still blocked with a car that lost its draw bar earlier this week, one evening about 9:15 PM. Train 11, which was very late to begin with, was behind the freight and arrived Santa Barbara about 11:30 PM. The bad order car only caused less than 90 minutes additional delay to #11, as #11 was already very tardy.—**Josiah Jenkins.**

A power outage due to a freak accident at 8:18am on Dec 8 cut off electrical power to almost 1 million people in San Francisco and parts of the Peninsula. Power came on gradually over a 6-hour period, but the work day was destroyed for many San Francisco workers. BART service was virtually halted, especially to San Francisco, for a time. There were conflicting reports over whether any BART trains were stalled in the transbay tube. SF Muni electric buses and light rail vehicles were immobilized, and numerous horror stories were later told of SF commuters being stranded in their commute efforts. Massive traffic jams ensued, and traffic lights did not function. Caltrain functioned with minor delays due to slowing for crossing signals that did not operate.

Later, the city threatened to sue Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for the outage, and BART said it would ask for reimbursement of $250,000 from PG&E for loss of about a quarter of their regular daily commuter business.

San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown on Dec 21 reported a change of heart: he now supports a plan to bring Caltrain into downtown San Francisco—to the Transbay Terminal—by way of tunneling. His earlier opposition had seemed to kill the plan, but officials said that now, after the passage of the advisory vote to place commuter train rails on the Bay Bridge when it is rebuilt, and after a showing of strong support for the planned So. Calif. to No. Calif. high-speed train (which would use the Transbay Terminal), and after supporters of the Caltrain downtown extension had qualified a ballot initiative for the Nov 1999 ballot, Brown has decided that he must support the $1 billion plan. Brown's re-election will be on the same ballot, and it was said that he did not want to be seen as opposing a "popular transportation issue" that would appear on that ballot.

Showtime on the *Starlight*

By Bill Hakkarinen

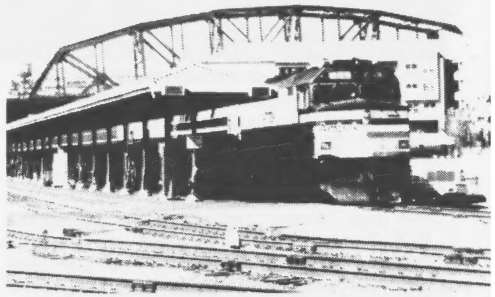
Photos by the author.

Amtrak's *Coast Starlight* has been the subject of numerous articles and accolades, both in the railfan press and the travel industry. The high level of service and pride in the operation are evident every moment aboard the train, but it was still an adventure to ride from Portland to San Jose on Sep 14, 1998.

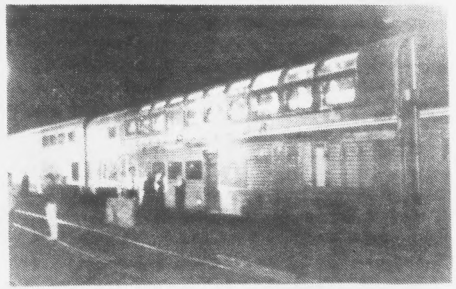
Show time began before the train's arrival. The "lobby" of the theater was the Metropolitan Lounge. A genial host, fresh coffee and comfortable seating served as a most gracious introduction to the journey. This may be Amtrak's best Metropolitan Lounge. Certainly the elegance of Portland Union Station has been kept in the design, and the area is a good fit architecturally.

An Amtrak F40, #393, was an unexpected actor on today's train. The veteran performer was in the lead, upstaging its eventualy replacement, the P42 Genesis. There were a few minutes before boarding while the locomotives were fueled, so I walked around the station to catch a photo of the "star".

An elegant setting waited in my room. Fresh flowers, white tablecloth, stationery packet, and an outstanding, detailed route guide, all said "welcome". Soon we were rolling across the Willamette River and the show had begun. Dinner reservations were taken, and I settled back to watch the river and Oregon greenery. I didn't stay long, though; wine tasting was announced in the Pacific Parlour Car.



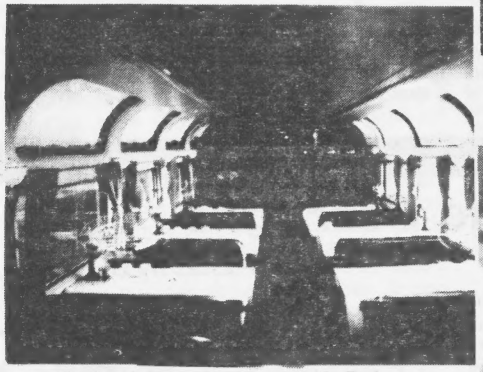
The *Coast Starlight* is refueled at Portland on Sep 4. F40 #393 has the lead. Usually the train rates two Genesis units.



The Pacific Parlour Car is aglow in the darkness at Klamath Falls.

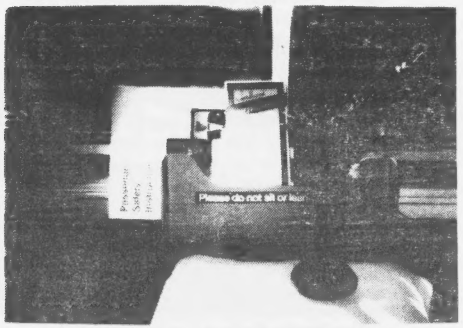
No, that is not a misspelling. This luxurious conveyance deserves the name "parlour". Wood paneling, art deco light fixtures, deeply cushioned living room chairs and sofas, all combine in an open, bright atmosphere of luxury. The car filled quickly for the wines and cheeses, and the mood of the theatergoers was distinctly upbeat. Second act was a traveling magician, who had the crowd roaring. I must admit to missing the mountains to the east with the spotlight remaining in the car.

I strolled the platform for a brief intermission at Eugene, then went to dinner. Good food and interesting conversation with a Portland accountant set the stage for the next feature. Dinner and a movie—what a great idea!



The bar-lounge end of the Pacific Parlour Car is well suited for groups and has tables for board games and snacks.

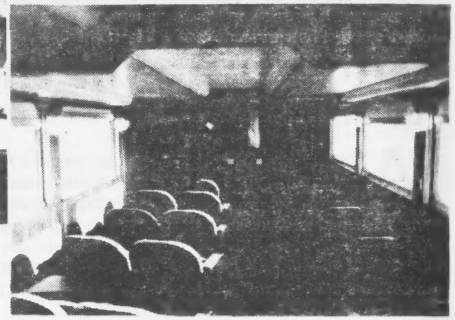
Downstairs in the Pacific Parlour is a 20-seat movie theater. No more twisting your neck in the Sightseer lounge. No, this was real theater seating and a big-screen VCR. A selection of films was available. "The Mouse Hunt" had just begun and provided humorous diversion. Actually, it *was* pretty funny. A second show would feature "Titanic".



Boarding passengers find this welcoming room arrangement.

Upstairs, others were playing board games from the car's game library, and there was a reading library as well. I sampled the liquid refreshments from the bar at the end of the car, feeling cosmopolitan as I casually stood at its brass rail. After a platform stroll at Klamath Falls, I was ready for sleep.

Deep-cushioned revolving chairs give a living-room appearance to the Pacific Parlour Car's lounge.



A 20-seat movie theater is downstairs in the Pacific Parlour Car.

I don't know if Mt. Shasta was moonlit. I slept soundly through Northern California. Sacramento brought bright sun, a filling breakfast, and the morning paper. Hearing the conductor's name, I made his acquaintance and shared a few moments conversation, since I knew we had mutual friends.

Soon the fog would enshroud the train, adding more mystery to the "ghost fleet" on Suisun Bay. Now the play became industrial, gray and metallic as we wound along the industrial waterway. Ocean-going ships filled the window on the north, with piping and factories to the south.

We lost time through the Bay Area, but it just allowed me time to finish the paper and thank the attendant for his service, and the wonderful souvenir insulated cooler. It would be a useful reminder of this satisfying journey, "Showtime on the *Starlight*".

Auto Train Drives Home A Winning Trip

By Jack M Turner

Auto Train equipment at Lorton VA on Sep 27. Amtrak P40 locomotive #839 leads the southbound train, while auto carriers are seen on a track behind the train. All photos by the author.

Auto-Train, a bold new private passenger train service, began operations between Lorton VA and Sanford FL in Dec 1971. Auto-Train quickly found a steady clientele composed of vacationers wishing to avoid 861 miles of driving between the Washington DC area and the suburbs of Orlando. The winter months were especially busy, as flocks of senior citizens headed to Florida for the winter, then returned north after the spring thaw.

The original Auto-Train was staffed by attractive and outgoing young people whose attentiveness made the journey a pleasure for passengers. The train's passenger equipment was first-rate as well, with most cars coming from the well-maintained UP and Santa Fe fleets that had been rendered surplus by the formation of Amtrak. Included were sleeping cars with bedrooms, drawing rooms and compartments, plus full-dome coaches and lounges that had seen service on Santa Fe's *Super Chief* and *El Capitan*, and Vista-Dome diners from the UP.

Auto-Train prospered for several years, with ridership peaking at over 200,000 passenger per year. The company's prosperity was slowed by a pair of derailments and further damaged by the unprofitability of a second route that linked Louisville and Sanford. On Sep 5, 1980, a front-page article in the Miami Herald reported that the Auto-Train Corporation was facing bankruptcy, as it was not paying its bills for using tracks belonging to Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. The company hung on for a while, but on May 1, 1981 the final Auto-Train pulled into Lorton, to the dismay of loyal and frequent riders.

After a hiatus of over two years, Auto Train service resumed under Amtrak ownership in late 1983. The timing was right for Amtrak, as many of its Heritage fleet passenger cars were available after the introduction of new Superliner equipment of Amtrak's Western trains. A mixture of Amfleet coaches, Heritage fleet sleepers, Vista-Dome coaches, full-dome lounge, and buffet dining cars would make up the consist for the next decade. In Mar 1995, Superliner II sleepers replaced the Heritage first class cars, followed a few months later by the conversion of the rest of the passenger consist to Superliner equipment.

Through the years, this writer watched the operation from various vantage points in Florida and Virginia, but had traveled aboard Auto-Train only once, a southbd journey in July 1975. Twenty-three years later, it was finally time to ride the Amtrak version as part of a trip to New England.

Friday, Sep 11, 1998 was a typically hot late-summer day in Florida. We arrived at the Sanford Auto Train terminal at 2:20pm and were greeted by a friendly gentleman at the check-in booth near the entrance to the Auto Train facility. After checking our tickets, he attached a magnetic sign to our car that bore the number 142.

(continued on page 19)

Inaugurating the Cascades Talgos

By Rocky Shay

It's the last day of November in the land of the Talgos—the long-awaited inauguration day for the brand new Talgo trains that will serve the Cascadia Corridor. Two inaugural trains will run today: one from Seattle to Portland and Eugene, the other from Vancouver BC to Seattle, with ceremonies along the way on both routes.

I'm at King Street Station as a special RTN correspondent. Also here are 150 or so others going to Portland and Eugene. I hope I can tell my grandchildren long in the future about how we were there to help start what eventually became the half-hourly train service between Seattle and Portland that they now enjoy.

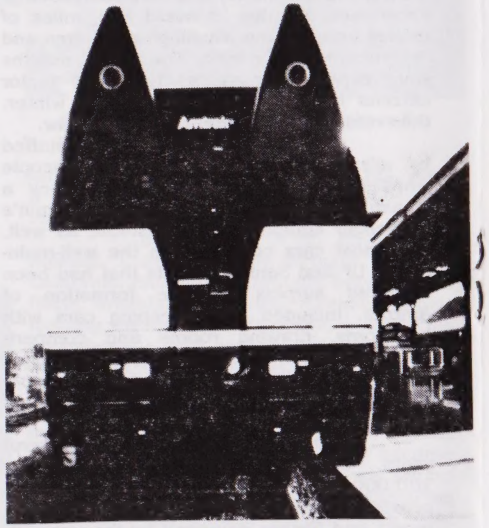
It's just before 8am and there's no train yet. But familiar faces start popping into view after we check in at the registration desk and get our nametags from smiling inaugural crew members. The first is NARP Director Jim Hamre, who is also WashARP's Newsletter Editor. Then, Dr. Al Runte, author of "Trains of Discovery". Al and I haven't chatted in a while. We talk about how he's both mentioned and praised in Joe Vranich's book "Derailed". Al says that Joe does hit some nails on the head, but he disagrees with the gloomy Vranich assessment of the economics of long-distance passenger trains. Al takes the Seldenite view that the long hauls are loaded up with Corridor costs to make the NE Corridor seem to be doing better than it really is. He says he has just finished the latest "Trains of Discovery".

Several Amtrak officials, among them Amtrak West CEO Gil Mallery, walk into the station. There's Ken Uznanski from the Washington State DOT Rail Branch, and Sara Hamlen of Amtrak West Government Affairs. Aamtrak's Dominick Albano is helping with press relations and other duties. And how here's Bruce Chapman of the Discovery Institute. He's a former Seattle City Councilman now on the Amtrak Reform Council. He can't ride today, but comes to see everybody off.

I introduce myself and ask him if the Reform Council is hobbled by the argument over money for use of consultants. He says no, just delayed. I then wonder what he thinks of the idea that the long hauls actually make money while the corridors don't. He says he's heard the argument and would like to see some numbers; he says he's open-minded about it.

Then at about 8:30, here comes the Talgo "Mt. Hood" trainset, backing down the northbound freight main past the station into the tunnel under downtown Seattle. We are told the Talgo "Mt. Baker" trainset is doing the Vancouver BC inaugural, originating in Vancouver later this morning and due back in Seattle about 2:30 this afternoon. The "Mt. Hood" emerges shortly for a banner breaking on station tunnel track one, recently rebuilt with concrete ties and welded rail as the first part of the King Street Station restoration. The banner proves stouter than the train. Both proceed down the track until train and unbroken banner finally come to a stop.

The amused crowd gathers round now for speeches. Washington DOT Secretary Sid Morrison emcees as people from Pacifica Marine, the Machinist Union-sponsored company that finished the new Talgos here in Seattle, talk about the trains. Also present are representatives of Pacifica's parent—the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers--, Amtrak's Gil Mallery and Washington Transportation Commission Chairman Tom Greene.



Holy Batmobile, Batman! Why didn't we think of that?--a Battrain! Those fins surely do resemble part of Batman's costume, as seen here on power car 7903, photographed at Portland on Nov 30. All photos by the author.

Talgo official Gustavo Gonzalez praises the train and the Talgo team in Seattle. Talgo CEO Lucas Oriol thanks the locals for their work on the Talgo demonstration. He says he hopes all of America gets into Talgos.

Our conductor today, Brad Schwartzwalter, tells about his "my other car's a train" bumpersticker. Greene, the Transportation Commission Chairman, wants more attention paid to Eastern Washington. This needed to be said because the state's passenger rail planners have made no secret of the fact that they have no interest in Eastern Washington beyond perhaps a few excursions. It may be helpful to know that the Chairman feels it should be otherwise. (A meeting on this had been held just the previous week between Spokane city officials and a WashARP delegation, and Talgos were on the agenda.)

Various plaques are exchanged and will be placed on today's train. One has the names of the Talgo and Pacifica teams. Special honors and a plaque go to the wife of the late Larry Finneman, a Machinist official who nurtured the Talgo project in its early days.

Now comes the traditional "All Aboard" and we're ready to board the $10 million Mt. Hood trainset—that's ten million plus engine. Here it is: engine 467 (F59PH in Cascades Talgo colors), cars 7104 (baggage with tail fins, six bicycle racks and "Mt. Hood" name), 36-seat 2-and-2 coaches 7410, 7411, 7412, 7413 and 7414, then 7502 (accessible coach with 19 seats in 2-and-1 configuration and wheelchair lift), 7302 (bistro car with counter seating for seven, a takeout section, seating in two booths for 6 or 7 more, and kitchen for both bistro and adjacent diner), 7802 (30-seat diner, 4 and 2 seating), 7552 (accessible custom-class coach with 19 seats in 2 and 1 configuration and wheelchair lift), 7452 (custom-class coach with 26 seats in 2 and 1 configuration), 7903 (power car with conductor's office, tail fins and "Mt. Hood" logo).

The tail fins bring many comments about the 1950s and Batman. The car exterior is painted in green, cream and cappucino (a brown, copper-like color) bands, with cappucino denoting Seattle's specialty coffee industry. While cab-baggage unit 90252 (ex-F40 252) is in town and ready to go in Talgo colors, it is not on our train today.

With everybody now ready, the highball is given. Engineer David Estes opens the throttle and we get underway at 9:03am as the *Coast Starlight* is backed in for its 9:45am departure. I didn't get the consist on the latter—too busy studying the Talgo interior from window seat 17 in coach 7412, on

There's something new in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. The same region that brought you lattes, jet planes and microbrews is again changing the way we live and travel.

INTRODUCING AMTRAK CASCADES.

Spectacular mountain and sea views. Vibrant cities. European-designed trains custom-built to meet your needs. The need to relax. The need to explore. And most of all, the need to see your world from a different perspective.

Amtrak CASCADES

Amtrak CASCADES

the left. The seat numbers are more prominently displayed on the luggage racks in these new Talgos.

We do look up from the interior to check the coach yard, or "Amtrak Holgate Street Maintenance Facility-No Trespassing". It's bare as can be; only Superliner coach 34101 can be seen. Farther down there is a Talgo sleeping car minus wheels and with the end doors boarded up. This car came to Seattle with the second leased train, but was not used.

The TV monitors on our ceiling have a nice display with a map of the Cascadia Corridor on the left side of the screen, an Amtrak Cascades logo in the upper right, and a status board with estimated Portland arrival time, 12:33pm, the current time, 9:06am now, the current temperature...wait a minute! *Minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit?!* And the next scheduled stop, Tacoma.

We hear a welcoming PA announcement, but quickly realize our car has no heat. (Later, we find that another coach has too much heat, but no PA. This is why the start of service with these trains is being delayed two or three weeks—bugs.)

The interiors are much more colorful than in the leased Talgos, where life is pretty much gray and blue and white. We have green luggage racks with individual reading lights below and chrome bars above with glass-type, rack-mounted luggage restraints, a green carpet-type fabric on the lower walls, green drapes, a green and gold pattern on the seats, which recline when you push a silvery button on the inner side of the outer armrests and push the seat cushion forward. There are cream-colored fold-down trays that pull out, then up. Headphone jacks are on the forward portion of the outer armrests, and they will take any standard headphone—no need to buy special ones as you did on the leased trains. The center armrests are definitely there, but fold up if you like.

Also, as requested by riders surveyed on the leased trains, electrical outlets for laptop computers appear near the floor at each seat pair. There's two-tone green and gold carpeting, cappucino on the ceiling above the luggage racks, with cream-colored center panels and louvred light track down the middle. There are multi-colored bulkheads at the car ends, with glass partitions next to the aisles, with a wavy green pattern in the glass. Beyond the end-of-car partitions are luggage racks, with a lidded waste container and aluminum can recycling bin below the one on the lower right. End doors, of course, slide open. A raised portion of the floor between cars seems flatter and more agreeable in these trains.

All that having been observed, we pick up speed past UP's Argo Yard and the related interlockings and crossovers. Seems like there's a little more lateral motion with this train. Soon we're off down the speedway to Tukwila, beating I-5 traffic by just a hair and passing various Boeing Company facilities on our right.

Now there's Tukwila, the site of the future joint Amtrak-Sound Transit-South King County-Seatac Airport station, and Black River Junction. This is where UP crosses back over BNSF to go down the west side of the Kent-Auburn valley. The aforementioned crossovers will be eliminated when UP and BNSF become a joint railroad between Black River Junction and Argo, sometime within the next couple of years, to facilitate the new Sound Transit commuter trains due at the end of next year. On we go, smoothly and swiftly through the curves as the white-haired but youthful-looking DOT Secretary Morrison walks the train. The former Republican Congressman from Eastern Washington has worked hard for this moment.

Up front is Northwest rail artist and WashARP member J. Craig Thorpe, selling amazingly accurate Talgo and other railroad posters. My new budget-busting trunk-tracking scanner advises that there are "no defects" in any of our 17 axles and picks up various clearances given to our train, officially designated as Amtrak 467. Soft music (we used to call it supermarket music in the radio biz) plays on the PA system, except of course in that car mentioned early that has too much heat.

Soon we stop quickly in Tacoma, pick up some more folks and then depart. Plans are afoot to ease some of the tight curves here. It's time to walk the train, but we don't get far. A TV crew is interviewing Sid Morrison in the aisle of the next car back. I spend time in the vestibule chatting with Ken Liesse editor of Flimsies Northwest.

Soon we're back between the diner and the bistro with train chief John Kukek. He says mobility is the big thing about this train—it's the only one in the US with full handicap accessibility to lounge and dining cars. He points to the wider passageways between the cars, flaring out at the base for wheelchairs. He speaks of better arrangements for the on-board crews as we enter mile-long Nelson Bennett Tunnel. The kitchen has been re-designed with better loading doors. A dining car storage area in the leased trains near the kitchen became a server's station in the new Talgos, where takeout service is possible. Also, no more need to take up a dining car table with serving stuff when doing a full linen setup in the diner. The bistro counter sweeps in from the aisle-side wall of the kitchen to the outer wall at the end of the car, with the two booths on the other side rather than across from each other. This eliminates the troublesome bistro congestion of the Spanish trains. And on the bistro ceiling, a lighted map of the Cascadia Corridor, reminiscent of the lighted fish

Chef Bruce Kane in the kitchen of the Talgo train.

panels on the upper walls in the diner-coaches on the old Great Northern streamlined Internationals, only this map is on the ceiling. Very striking, to say the least. Cascadia interior colors predominate throughout, with a few variations in the diner and bistro.

But back to the kitchen where we are talking with chef Bruce Kane (someone with such a name would have to work on the battrain—Ed.). He's fixing wonderful hors d'oeuvres. He has really first-class breads and cheeses—and pound cake, just like on the Northern Pacific diners of old. Also we find Talgo's Mariano de la Vega. He has some technical information on the Talgo cars. They're about 42 feet long, roughly half the length of a Superliner. Car weights vary from 18 metric tons for the power car to about eight metric tons for the diner and eleven or so for each coach. The power car generates 360 kilowatts for lights, heat, etc., but there's plenty of room to add cars. Unlike the leased Spanishs trains, the head end power from the F59 can be used as a backup for the power car. Also, what was a second power car on the Spanish trains is the baggage car on the US Talgos.

Now a Talgo inaugural crew member still in commemorative cap hands me an espresso chocolate truffle bar in gorgeous copper-colored wrapper with a Talgo picture in the middle. It reads "Inaugural" above the train picture. De la Vega says the leased trains may not be going back to Spain, the FRA permitting. There have been a lot of states inquiring about the demo up in Washington and Oregon, and serious talks are underway with North Carolina about a demo there.

As we approach Olympia-Lacey Centennial Station, Kurt Laird, Amtrak's Cascadia Corridor General Manager, confirms that there are still some little mechanical and electrical problems with these trains, hence the delay in start of regular service for another two or three weeks. He wants everything just right—and the leased trains are doing just fine, their bugs chased out in Spain years ago. Talgo inaugural crew members talk of technicians working at 4:00 this morning to prepare the Mt. Hood for this inaugural.

Transportation Secretary Morrison alights from the train in Olympia, and WashARP Executive Director Lloyd Flem and others get on following a platform ceremony. We meet northbound leased Talgo train 750 from Eugene just south of Olympia and cross over from Main One to Main Two at Wabash. Every now and then a BNSF or UP freight turns up.

Then, near Centralia, we meet the Seahawk Amfleet train deadheading back from Portland after doing Thanksgiving holiday extras all last week with as many as eight cars. We now have a few questions for Amtrak West's Gil Mallery. First, what's up with the proposed Talgo Las Vegas service? Well, seems all was set to start in February *before* doing $28 million in infrastructure improvements requested by UP, but then UP changes its mind and wanted the improvements, mostly double-tracking and crossovers, done first. So the startup will likely be late 1999 instead of February.

The Talgo for that is a gaudy affair, with 52 more seats in two additional cars, and red and purple colors inside. Names of the Rio and Prima Donna Casinos are inscribed inside; Amtrak plans to partner with them. The train is not yet named (how about "Tilting Nugget" or "6-inch Cant Deficiency Gamblers' Special"? Wonder what's on the bistro ceiling of *that* train?) Mallery says capacity on the Northwest trains, only 244 seats, is a concern. Many people are being turned away on some weekend trips. There is a good possibility that the Northwest trains will get the two-car, 52-seat expansion later, but no decisions have been made.

Asked about rumors that the business units are about to be dropped in favor of a single Amtrak once again, Mallery says all companies change and evolve, but what has to happen now is the naming of a permanent Amtrak President.

Next on my interview list is Washington Secretary of State Ralph Munro, who boarded at Olympia. What's he doing here? Doesn't he deal mostly with things like overseeing elections? Not always. It seems he helped lead a trade mission to Spain about six years ago, and the idea of a Talgo demo in Washington State came up. Washington transportation officials and legislators and the Spanish government got involved, and the rest is now history.

Now a talk with Lucas Oriol, CEO of Talgo. He speaks of how Talgo's inventor, a Spanish engineer named Goicocchea, approached the Oriol family in 1940 trying to find a way to build a prototype for this unique tilt-train design he had come up with.

Guess where they wound up? That's right—the United States! American Car and Foundry built the first Talgo train, but the early Talgos never caught on in the US. There followed many incarnations of Talgos. The pendular version we have today first came on the scene in 1980 and has been updated. There are about 100 sets operating worldwide, including some in Germany, which, Oriol notes, has rarely used other nations' technologies.

As to the leased trains, he says the FRA waiver under which they operate concerns relatively minor matters—handrails and window glazing (the windows of the US trains are much clearer). Asked about a recent attempt in Congress to raise US structural standards to a point that would literally kick the Talgos out of America, Oriol says the US trains are being designed to meet any new standards that might be adopted.

(Ironically, local sources say the attempt to set the much-tougher structural standards wound up being quashed largely by Amtrak opponent Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA). Gorton, as a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, reportedly came through when state officials and legislators, including some prominent Republicans, sought his help. Gorton apparently regarded this as aiding local business, while making points with fellow Republicans. Gorton, by the way, is running for re-election in 2000.)

Oriol is obviously proud of these trains. In a later conversation in the bistro car, he says Talgos have run with no problems at 11-inch cant deficiency on curves, much more than the six inches they are federally authorized for in the Cascadia Corridor.

Approaching Kelso, I check the restrooms. They have mostly green interiors. And, as requested by new parents who rode the leased trains, they contain infant changing tables. Approaching the tunnel at Ostrander, I end up in the "1" side of 2-and-1 seating in an accessible coach. Thanks for this go to WashARP member Roger Mumm. From here, we see that there's a lighted "restroom occupied" sign on the front bulkhead! Clever! Also, a dining car directional sign and another sign mentioning that Amtrak tickets are available via the Internet.

We're into Kelso at 11:39. Among those we pick up is veteran Oregon rail activist Ken McFarling. Why, he's been around probably as long as I have! I'm soon asked to go to the second coach to sign a huge Talgo inaugural banner. Lots of people were there for us at the Kelso intermodal terminal.

Being served in the diner now is a *really good* pastry concoction stuffed with crab. It's all gone in a hurry. While in the diner, Amtrak Police Detective Chris Glass introduces himself, notes my Amtrak Cascades name tag, and asks about RTN. I speak highly of it and promise to arrange a copy for him. We speak of what railroad police do and some of the problems they face. He says it's more a service routine here in the Northwest. In California, his last assignment, it was more crime control. He says that in working with city police he often has to explain trains from the absolute basics up. He asks me to tell you that if you ever need Amtrak Police, they can be reached toll-free 24 hours a day at 1-800-331-0008.

As all this goes on, veteran Amtrak attendants Ed Forest, Paul Albers, Georgia Ruddy and Harry Collins, and Assistant Conductor Dave Partridge continue their good work. Coming into Vancouver WA, we get our only troublesome delay. Seems an automatic switch is malfunctioning, so it's lined by hand to get us into the Vancouver station.

But soon we're off to Portland and a slightly late 12:50 arrival...and a big platform event with a couple hundred people. This time *Oregon* dignitaries call for more and better trains. One says I-5 was a parking lot between Seattle and Portland over Thanksgiving, while the trains rolled smoothly.

Gil Mallery sounds excited as he says we have not just the Mt. Hood, but *four* Talgos slated for operation in the Cascadia Corridor (they are Mt. Hood, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Baker and the Mt. Olympus, which is due out of Pacifica Marine soon). The Willamette Valley Passenger Rail Advisory Council wants two more trains between Portland and Eugene with 2-hour travel time by 2002. But Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber and the Oregon DOT Rail Division are fighting for legislative support to maintain the one local round trip there now (the Eugene extension of the evening train south from Seattle and the morning train north) and they've already nearly lost it once, despite growing ridership.

Even with that, we have an upbeat scene as the folks headed for Eugene board the Mt. Hood for ceremonies there. But it's about over for many of us Puget Sounders who have to get home. Three chartered (and luxurious, with video monitors) stretch coaches from Hesselgrave International await us. After checking out train 28's consist and about a dozen express cars on the Portland station tracks, I board Hesselgrave 5506, assigned to run nonstop up I-5 back to King Street Station. It leaves on time at 1:30.

Despite heavy rain from Centralia north and sluggish Seattle traffic, we're back at King Street in time to watch an eastbound *Empire Builder* head out. With work yet to be done on the new trains, the two old, reliable leased Talgos and a Superliner set will be covering tomorrow's regular Cascadia Corridor runs.

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

The *Lake Shore Limited* roars through scenic farm land in upstate New York at Weedsport, west of Syracuse, on Conrail's former New York Central Water Level Route on Sep 4, 1998. The train is running over two hours late, which was typical for the *Lake Shore Limited* for much of the summer due to track work in the Midwest and the additional time required at stations to add and remove RoadRailers and express cars. The *Lake Shore Limited* is one of Amtrak's last single-level long distance trains, and carries a mixture of Amfleet, Heritage Fleet and new Viewliner cars in its consist.—Photo and caption by Alex Mayes.

No more "Amtrak"? Amtrak plans to change its name and its "pointless arrow" logo in 1999 and take on an entirely new identity in keeping with its feeling that it is entering a new era of better passenger train service, and including the introduction of real high-speed service in the Northeast. Amtrak's plan for the identity switch is stated in its current business plan.

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New Amtrak President selected:

The following is a press release from Amtrak dated Dec 21:

WASHINGTON – Today at Union Station, the Board of Directors for Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, announced the selection of George Warrington to become the company's new President and Chief Executive Officer. Warrington, who has been serving as Acting President of Amtrak since December 1997, has more than 20 years of experience as a nationally recognized transportation leader and led Amtrak to one of its best years ever with record revenue and ridership gains.

"Today we have realized a primary goal as Amtrak turns the corner–new, permanent and innovative leadership for the company. There is no better-qualified person than Warrington to take the helm of Amtrak as proven by his effective and business-like leadership this past year, and prior to that as head of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Strategic Business Unit," said Gov. Tommy Thompson, Amtrak's Board Chairman. "For the past year, Warrington has orchestrated a quiet but dramatic turnaround. With his vision for the future in place – our Strategic Business Plan – we have begun to see some positive results that will power Amtrak into the 21st century."

This year has been one of the best ever at Amtrak, with such milestones as:

* achieving the greatest ridership increase in a decade;
* surpassing the $1 billion mark in passenger revenue for the first time in the company's history;
* accomplishing the best on-time performance in 13 years; and
* reaching collective bargaining agreements with 80 percent of the workforce.

At today's news conference, Warrington outlined his vision for Amtrak, which focuses on becoming operationally self-sufficient by the end of fiscal year 2002 and building a more modern national railroad. "The key to Amtrak's long-term success depends on transforming the national passenger rail network into a more market-driven service provider that offers the service, destinations and convenience that travelers want," Warrington said. "In 1998, we began turning the corner toward our goal, and through implementation of our

commercially focused Strategic Business Plan, I am confident we will build upon this year's phenomenal results."

The cornerstone of the Strategic Business Plan, and one of Amtrak's greatest new revenue generators, is the 1999 launch of high speed rail between Boston, New York and Washington. Warrington initiated its planning, financing and implementation while serving as President of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. Other key business plan strategies include:

* the expansion and improvement of service in other corridors;
* the company's first market-based network analysis to attract new customers and satisfy the needs of Amtrak's 21 million customers; and
* the first comprehensive service standards program, to deliver improved consistent customer service and loyalty.

Under Warrington's leadership as President of the Northeast Corridor, his innovations improved the Corridor's bottom line by $200 million from 1994 to 1997. Ridership grew eight percent during that span to more than $11 million annually, while on-time performance rose to 90%.

At today's announcement, Warrington expressed his gratitude by thanking the Board and others who have played critical roles in Amtrak's recent performance. "Amtrak's success this year lies primarily with our dedicated employees who are literally the engine that drives this train. Success also lies with Congress, where lawmakers fully funded Amtrak's federal appropriation for the first time ever in the company's history, as well as states nationwide where we have begun and strengthened strategic partnerships. And, with grass roots supporters who tirelessly fight for a strong national rail network."

The President and CEO will immediately begin to bolster the broad-based coalition that supports Amtrak with a visit tomorrow to Chicago to meet employees and key supporters followed by trips to Los Angeles and New York, as well as meetings with Members of Congress and rail labor leaders...

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The *Texas Eagle,* train 21 westbound, derailed on Sunday evening, Dec. 20, in Arlington, TX. About 199 passengers were on board, and reportedly 15 were injured but none seriously. Only four hours earlier the same train struck and killed a deaf woman who had been walking the tracks. The Federal Railroad Administration and National Transportation Safety Board are investigating the cause of the derailment. The tracks are owned by Union Pacific RR with posted speeds of 60 mph. Reports are that the train was going slower than the 60 mph maximum.

The watercolor painting on Amtrak's 1999 calendar shows the *Texas Eagle* leaving Fort Worth, en route from Chicago to San Antonio and Los Angeles. The watercolor is by the noted artist Ted Rose. The calendar is available from: Amtrak Calendar, PO Box 7717, Itasca IL 60143 at a price of $6 each or two for $10 postpaid. Amtrak says don't send cash.

The consist of the derailed *Texas Eagle* was engines 60, 313 and 377; cars 1173 baggage, 39041 transition-dorm, 32014 sleeper, 38031 diner, 33034 lounge, 31530 smoking coach, coaches 34024, 35005 & 34061, 32039 sleeper, mail car 1541, deadhead cars to train 322: 20012, 54523 & 54540; express cars to Dallas: 70008, 71022, 71037, 71083, 71156 & 71165, end-of-train device. One locomotive and four cars derailed at 7:05pm. Arlington TX is about 16 miles west of Dallas. Amtrak chartered buses to handle the missed stops between Dallas and San Antonio, putting bused passengers on train 1 at San Antonio, and housed passengers from the derailed train overnight while arranging alternate transportation.

Reporting further on the appointment of George Warrington as permanent Amtrak president, NARP noted that Board Chairman (and Wisconsin Governor) Tommy Thompson said at the announcement meeting, "I also served with Downs and Claytor. I think that George is going to be the star of all of them." He said that the vote was unanimous. NARP quoted Meridian MS Mayor John Robert Smith, head of the search committee as saying the competition was tough, but the decision was not. Gov. Dukakis said "We're satisfied we have the right guy" and said he was much more optimistic about Amtrak's future than he was last June.

NARP reported that Warrington later said that "In the face of all the problems that Union Pacific has had, CEO Dick Davidson and his people have been extraordinarily responsive in working to get our trains over the railroad." Deputy DOT Secretary Mort Downey cited Warrington's role as coalition builder and consensus builder. Downey also gave Warrington credit for full funding of Amtrak in the budget, perhaps the first public statement that Clinton's 2000 budget will have the $571 million for Amtrak that FRA chief Jolene Molitoris promised earlier this year.

NARP added, "The big question mark for federal funding remains nationwide high-speed rail, which could get $35.25 million if all authorized funds are provided."

Warrington said, reported NARP, that his appointment was "a genuine honor, the proudest day of my life except for when my son was born. I want to thank the workers of this railroad. The turnaround Amtrak is experiencing is due in large part to them." He also gave special thanks to Congress, the Administration, governors, mayors, local officials, labor leaders and organizations, business partners and NARP.

Warrington continued, "With the support we've received, our goals for the future are well within reach. We will enhance and expand corridors nationwide. We're doing the first market-based study, introducing service standards to enhance quality and consistency of service on all our trains. We can no longer exist only with a survivor mentality focused on cost-cutting and being apologists for mediocrity. Our future depends upon growth, identifying and attracting new customers."

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New High-Speed Corridors

Transportation Secretary Slater announced an expanded High-Speed Rail Program on Dec 10, under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991. The program will expand the number of federally designated high-speed rail corridors from five to eleven. Designated corridors are eligible for funding to eliminate hazards at highway-rail crossings.

"Safety is President Clinton's highest transportation priority, and by eliminating hazards, this program improves safety," Secretary Slater said. "High-speed rail is an important part of our vision for a safe, flexible, seamless intermodal transportation system-providing for economic growth and greater mobility for both rural and urban Americans-in the 21st century."

Section 1103 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which President Clinton signed on June 9, 1998, continues the highway-rail grade crossing hazard elimination program. The program will be managed jointly by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

"States already have invested millions of dollars in high-speed rail initiatives. This program leverages that investment and provides the leadership for a new generation of high-speed rail services," FRA Aministrator Jolene M. Molitoris said.

Key elements of the expanded hazard elimination program include:

An increase in the number of designated high-speed corridors from 5 (prior to the passage of TEA-21) to eight, with the addition of the Gulf Coast, Keystone, and Empire State corridors. Up to three additional high-speed rail corridors may be selected by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, for a total of 11. Contract authority of $31.5 million through fiscal 2003 to be used for all the designated high-speed rail corridors.

The FRA is soliciting applications from states, individually or in conjunction with other states, for designation of high-speed corridors and for funding highway-rail crossing improvements on those corridors. Each corridor must have rail lines where train speeds of 90 mph or more are possible or can be reasonably achieved in the future. The FRA and the FHWA will jointly review

and evaluate applications for corridor designations and funding.

To date, eight corridors have been designated:

*California Corridor (San Francisco Bay Area-Los Angeles-San Diego);

*Pacific Northwest Corridor (Eugene, Ore-Portland, Ore-Seattle-Vancouver, B.C.);

*Chicago Hub Corridor, extending from Chicago to St. Louis; to Detroit; to Minneapolis/St. Paul via Milwaukee;

*Florida Corridor (Miami-Orlando-Tampa);

*Southeast Corridor (linking the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Richmond, Va. (with an extension to Hampton Roads, Va.), Raleigh, N.C., Columbia, S.C., Savannah, Ga., Jacksonville, Fla., *and another route linking Charlotte, N.C., Greensboro, N.C., Spartanburg, S.C., Atlanta and Macon, Ga.;

*Gulf Coast Corridor; New Orleans hub extending westward to Baton Rouge, La., and Houston; and eastward to Biloxi, Miss., and Mobile, Ala.;

*Keystone Corridor, (Philadelphia-Harrisburg, Pa.);

*and The Empire Corridor, (New York City-Albany, N.Y.-Buffalo, N.Y.)

Of the eight corridors listed, the first five were designated and funded under the predecessor grade crossing hazard elimination program in Section 1010 of ISTEA. Currently, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas are investing in, or seriously studying, upgrades to existing rail corridors in order to provide high-speed rail passenger service.

More late details on the Dec 20 *Texas Eagle* derailment: all three engines and six of 10 cars derailed at UP milepost 230. The first two engines were upright and in line, while engine 377, baggage 1173, dorm 39041 and sleeper 32014 derailed and fell on their sides; diner 38031 derailed and was pointing toward a ditch; and lounge 33034 and smoking coach 31530 were derailed but upright and in line. The train was 2hrs, 40mins late at the time, and was running at about 35mph because the dispatcher had radioed a 40mph speed limit, since a preceding freight had reported very rough track and another had reported that crossing gates ¼-mile west of the derailment site had been broken off by a motorist. If the train had been doing the usual limit of 60mph, the wreck would have been worse. There were minor injuries to 17 passengers, four on-board employees and one operating crew person.—Texas Eagle Advocates.

News in this issue is updated through Dec 27, 1998. Contributors to this issue included Bill Farmer, Alan Miller, Gene Poon, Ray Saunders, Art Schultz, and Barry Steinberg. Our apologies to reader Duncan Watry for neglecting to obtain his permission before re-publishing his report on the ACE in RTN 592, which was posted on the Internet.

RAIL FANTRIPS

Feb 27: Private car "Caritas" participates in the RR Enthusiasts' annual Snow Train from Boston to Bellows Falls VT and return. Car turned on Green Mt RR turntable, Walpole NH. $250 incl bkfst, lch & din. Limit 16. High Iron Travel, Box 50116, Minneapolis MN 55405. Call 612-922-7259.

Mar 7, 13 or 14: Boston-NY-Boston, on "Caritas" with complete bkfst before NY arrival. Shop, see matinee, museum, cocktail hour on car, fine dinner on return trip. $250. Call for exact schedules. High Iron Travel, Box 50116, Minneapolis MN 55405. Phone 612-922-7259. MC & Visa accepted.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 or E-mail rtn@trainweb.com.

CARS & CONSISTS

***Holiday Extra train 748,** running as Portland-Seattle advance section of Talgo 750, Tacoma WA Nov 25: engine 460 (F59PH in blue and silver); cars Amfleet I 44206 (refurbished NE Direct coach labeled for San Diegan service), 44023 coach, 43015 cafe with "City of Fullerton" sign on one side, coaches 44275 & 44635.—Rocky Shay.

***Fast Mail**, train 12, New Haven Nov 29: engines 904 & 920 (AEM7s, off at New Haven), 287 & 268 (F40s, on at New Haven); coaches 44020, 44602, 21241, cafe-dinette 20231, coaches 21262, 44661, 21226, 21194, 21165, 21066, MHCs 1445 & 1518, baggage 1726. Train on time.—Bob Underwood.

***Pennsylvanian**, train 44, Toledo OH Dec 20: engines 17 & 41 (P42); cars 1419, coaches 54551, 54004, & 25088, cafe 43027, Road-Railer 460130. (On Dec 20 in Toledo there were 12 Atk express box cars parked. Cars 71131 & 71193 were labeled "Mail Service Only CHI-LAX".

***Auto Train**, train 52, Sanford FL Sep 11, 1998 (from Jack Turner's article): engines 833 & 839; cars 39000, 32100 "New York", 32108 "South Carolina", 32501 "Palm Beach", 33101 lounge, 38051 diner, 32504 "Palm Harbor", 32101 "North Carolina", 38067 diner, 34124, 34129, 34126, 33102 lounge, 34122, 34120, 38053 diner, auto carriers 9021, 9006, 9004, 9035, 9014, 9093, 9095, 9097, 9022, 9010, 9009, 9008, 9001, 9002, 9023, 9030, 9105, 9108, 9109, 9115, 9107, 9104, 9101. Same, train 53, Lorton VA Sep 27: engines 839 & 834; cars 38045 diner, 34121, 34118, 33100 lounge, 34125, 34119, 38054 diner, 32107 "Rhode Island", 32502 "W. Graham Claytor Jr.", 38041 diner, 33104 lounge, 32505 "Palm Springs" 32087 "Maine", 32089 "Massachusetts", 39001, auto carriers 9000, 9015, 9020, 9005, 9024, 9012, 9003, 9014, 9030, 9001, 9034, 9100, 9114, 9106, 9105, 9101, 9090, 9091, 9094. (33100-series lounges are ex-dining cars. 32500-series cars are deluxe sleepers. 9000-series auto carriers are bi-levels. 9090-series are van carriers. 9100-series are tri-level auto carriers.)

***Lake Shore Limited**, train 49, Sandusky OH Dec 20: engines 89 & 53 (P42); cars 1253 baggage, 2434 "Pacific Plateau" crew slpr, Viewliner slprs 62017 "Majestic View" & 62014 "Imperial View", 8552 diner, 28022 lounge, coaches 25069, 25097, 25114, 25009, 21638 & 25019, Viewliner slpr 62044 "Sylvan View", 1165 bag, 1558 & 1549 mail, 71151 & 71176 express boxcars. (Car 21638 is Amfleet I NortheastDirect service.)—George Danchisen.

Auto Train (continued from page 12-A)

This number would facilitate the retrieval of our car at Lorton the next morning. The number had no other significance, as the vehicle ahead was number 232 and the one behind us is number 415. The booth attendant then directs us to lane number two under a canopy outside the waiting room where we will unload items needed aboard the train.

A pleasant woman meets us at the unloading area and reminds us that we will have no access to our automobile during the trip. After we take our overnight bags out of the car, an attendant drives the car onto one of the 23 auto carriers that are included in today's 39-car consist. The auto carriers stand in cuts of four or five cars each and are loaded on five separate tracks, which speeds up the loading and unloading process. The positioning of the loading ramps at Sanford and Lorton means that vehicles are loaded and unloaded facing forward but ride backwards during the train trip.

Auto carriers are about to be switched onto the rear of the southbound *Auto Train* at Lorton VA on Sep 27.

Inside the waiting room we check in at the ticket counter where we are given our boarding passes and dinner reservations for the first sitting. By 2:40pm the first boarding announcement is made, and we happily climb aboard Superliner II sleeper "Palm Beach", which is spotted right outside the waiting room. On the northbound run the sleepers are directly behind the locomotives, while the southbound run finds them at the rear of the passenger section of the train. Many of the sleepers on the *Auto Train* are named for states along its route or for states from which its passengers hail. The "New York", "South Carolina" and "North Carolina" are in today's consist, along with deluxe sleepers "Palm Beach" and "Palm Harbor". The auto carriers, meanwhile, are always located on the rear end of the train, since they do not have head-end power cables.

An automobile full of passengers arrives at the check-in booth at 3:25pm, just five minutes before the 3:30 deadline. The southbound *Silver Meteor* passes ten minutes later on the main line, and soon a final boarding announcement is made for *Auto Train* passengers. A switch engine is busily marshaling the auto carriers into one

string, and then couples up to five waiting passenger cars stationed on a stub track south of the waiting room. Before long, the entire train is assembled, brake test completed, and authority to proceed received.

We depart Sanford at 4:12pm, 18 mins ahead of schedule. This practice has been commonplace ever since the inception of *Auto Train* service, as the deadline for checking in automobiles is 3:30pm, which means that once the loading of the autos and assembly of the train are complete, the train is ready to depart.

Shortly after threading our way out onto the main line, we cross the St. Johns River at the mouth of Lake Monroe. We already have been welcomed aboard Family Bedroom F by our car attendant, Lorrie Hargrove, and soon are welcomed by another crew member via intercom. He advises that today's train consists of 39 cars: 16 passenger cars and 23 auto carriers, and is ¾-mile long. There are 203 passengers, 106 autos (including vans) and three motorcycles aboard. The on-board staff totals 25 and there are two engineers, a conductor and an assistant conductor. Throughout the trip, all announcements are clear and professional and it is obvious that the *Auto Train* is well-managed.

We sail past the Amtrak station in DeLand at 4:45pm and soon pass through charred woodlands between Barberville and Seville that were scorched in this summer's forest fires. Our dinner seating is called at 5:30 and we find the first-class dining car nicely appointed with maroon table cloths, and each table set with a carafe of iced tea. The dinner offers a choice of roast prime rib of beef, grilled chicken breast or poached salmon. My wife, son and I each select a different entree and each of us is pleased with the meal.

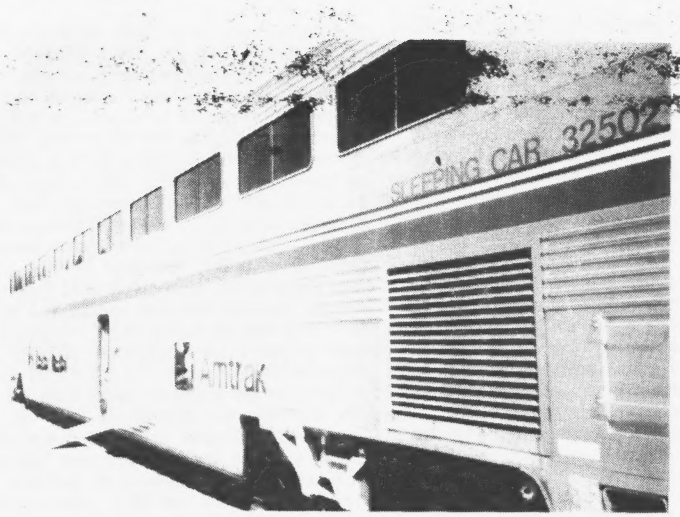
Our fellow diners are mostly older people and the tone is pleasantly quiet in the dining car. While we dine we pass a southbound CSX intermodal train and the eastbound *Sunset Limited*, which both wait in a siding at Pecan, just north of Palatka. Passengers at nearby tables are amazed as we pass through another burned forest at 6pm and one man is heard to exclaim, "No wonder the trains weren't running back then!" My dinner, meanwhile, has to be among the best I have ever enjoyed aboard a train, as the prime rib, green beans and baked potato were prepared just right.

On the way back to our sleeper, I take time to stop in the first-class lounge car and chat with Crew Chief Julie Byrne. The lounge cars on the *Auto Train* were originally Superliner diners, but were renovated for use on this run and re-numbered in the 33100 series. One end of the car retains traditional tables for four; however, the other end has curved divan-type seating on one side of the aisle and tables for two on the opposite side. Art deco magazine racks are filled with ample reading material. An attractive bar area has been added in the center of the cars and looks a lot like lounge cars of the pre-Amtrak era. TV monitors are mounted on bulkheads in the lounge areas, transforming the car into a rolling movie theater at night.

Julie invites me to inspect the downstairs area, where the galley has been removed and replaced by an etched-glass enclosed smoking area and a non-smoking sitting area, also enclosed by glass. I ask her whether the dumbwaiters formerly used to carry meals from the kitchen to the dining area are still in place, and she tells me that the crews convinced Beech Grove to retain one dumbwaiter per car to expedite moving cases of sodas and snacks to the upper level when loading the train.

Our sleeper, "Palm Beach", is one of six deluxe sleepers built specifically for the *Auto Train*. Upstairs there are 10 deluxe bedrooms rather than the usual five deluxe and 10 economy bedrooms found on most Superliner sleepers. Deluxe bedrooms A-E remain at one end of the car, while the end normally containing economy rooms includes deluxe bedrooms J-N. There is the usual coffee, juice and ice stand in the center of the upstairs area, but no upstairs restroom, since all deluxe bedrooms have their own facilities. The downstairs configuration remains the same as on other Superliner sleepers, with the family bedroom at one end next to four economy bedrooms and a community luggage rack, and the handicapped bedroom, three lavatories and a shower at the other end.

Another view of the switching operation of auto carriers on Sep 27 at Lorton.



Superliner sleeping car 32502 "W. Graham Claytor Jr.", named for the former Amtrak president, is one of six deluxe sleepers on the southbound *Auto Train* that is about to leave Lorton VA on Sep 27.

The *Auto Train* rolls past the Jacksonville Amtrak station at 6:57pm. An Amtrak switcher is shunting roadrailers and express cars around for tonight's northbd *Silver Star*, which is about an hour behind us. The movie "Mouse Hunt" is playing in the lounge car, but I elect to watch for the remnants of a freight-train pileup north of Hilliard.

We cross over to track 1 at Bolougne (milepost 610) and soon pass an impressive mass of hopper cars that derailed three days earlier between mileposts 605 annd 606. Axles lie alongside the right-of-way and there are perhaps 16 or 17 smashed-up hopper cars strewn around the wreck site. At one point there are two or three cars piled atop one another. Fortunately, the wreck site is just south of the St. Marys River bridge and none of the cars fell into the river. I realize how fortunate we are, as the railroad was closed down for over 24 hours, but luckily we were able to get through.

It is time for bed as we roll through South Carolina at about 10pm. We have already had meets with 11 CSX freight trains and I am vaguely aware of several more through the night. Many of these meets seem to require see-saw moves through sidings as our long train meets lengthy freights. The unusually high volume of traffic is due to the recent closure of the railroad due to the freight derailment, which has backed up freight shipments.

We awaken to the sight of the *Auto Train* crossing the tall trestle over the James River at Richmond. Continental breakfast is served in the dining car. Each table is set with a carafe of orange juice, basket of bagels and muffins, bananas, and a selection of cold cereals. The train loses about 20mins as it makes a rare stop at the Richmond station to detrain an ill passenger. During the delay, train 86, the *Colonial*, slips out ahead of us on its run to New York.

North of Richmond we pass through Ashland VA, where the railroad tracks are surrounded on both sides by a local street and several lovely old homes followed by the attractive Randolph-Macon College campus. As we pass the college, I recall the fall of 1972 when I briefly attended Randolph-Macon and made a nightly ritual of watching the original *Auto-Train* pass on its southward trek to Florida.

Another delay lurks ahead at Hamilton as the crew is unable to hear a defect detector's reply after we pass, so the operating crew must visually inspect the train. This process takes from 8:34 to 9:03am and is mandated by operating rules, and obviously is important for safety reasons. Julie keeps passengers informed about the delay and correctly projects a 10am arrival in Lorton.

The auto carriers were uncoupled just south of the Lorton station and already are being shunted onto the unloading tracks by the time we detrain. The first vehicles come off the train within 10mins and passengers wait like lottery contestants to see whose vehicles come off first. There is no scientific method for calculating whether one's car will be first or last off the train, as the auto carriers are not necessary split into the same cuts in Lorton as they were in Sanford. As each vehicle is unloaded, a terminal manager announces the vehicle number on the PA system. The unloading of cars is handled with great efficiency by perhaps a

dozen workers. After about 30mins, vehicle number 142 is called; it appears that we are about halfway through the unloading process.

The placement of the Auto Train terminals in Sanford and Lorton was originally made for a variety of reasons that are still appropriate today. The Sanford location is central to all Florida points, and is within one-half hour of Walt Disney World, which opened about the time that the original Auto-Train debuted. The Lorton site, meanwhile, is adjacent to I-95, which links all major Northeastern cities and is south of the railroad tunnels in Washington and Baltimore, which would restrict the operation of tri-level auto carriers. Of equal importance is the fact that the location of the two terminals allows a late-afternoon departure and early-morning arrival, thus permitting passengers to drive to and from the terminals in one day. The schedule gives cleaning crews enough time to service the train between runs, and requires only two sets of equipment.

After several more railroad adventures in the Northeast and Eastern Canada (to be reported in upcoming issues of RTN) as well as some touring by auto, it is time to return home on the Auto Train on Sunday, Sep 27. We arrive at the Lorton terminal at 2:40pm and go through the same smooth check-in process as we had for the northbound trip. The train begins accepting passengers just as we arrive, so we go directly from the ticket check-in counter to Family Bedroom F in car 32505 "Palm Springs". Once more we are located in a deluxe sleeper, which is nice, as there is little competition for lavatory or shower facilities, since the deluxe bedrooms upstairs have their own.

Nat King Cole's classic tune "Unforgettable" is playing on our sleeper's intercom system. This song is appropriate, as these trips on the Auto Train are truly unforgettable. Departure comes five minutes early at 4:25pm, and soon the crew chief announces that this trip has 15 passenger cars with 282 passengers, 19 auto carriers transporting 169 vehicles, and two locomotives with a combined 8000 horsepower. September is a swing month in between the traditional summer family vacation period and the onset of winter tourists streaming to Florida; thus ridership is about half of its peak season totals. During those periods, it is the norm for Auto Train to carry about 550 passengers.

The smooth track of the old Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad (now part of the CSX family) invites a pre-dinner nap, and the three of us get a good 45-min rest. Once more we had chosen the 5:30 dinner sitting over the 7:30 second sitting, so soon it is time to visit the diner.

The crews on Auto Train refer to the first class dining car as the "Starlight Diner", while the two diners for coach passengers are simply called Diner A and Diner B. Once more the prime rib is superb, and it carries us through Ashland and Richmond. Following dinner, we retire to the first class lounge car to play cards and enjoy the 7:15pm showing of the movie "Odd Couple II". Late diners are offered a 9:15 viewing of the movie.

As evening falls, Petersburg slides past our window, followed by Rocky Mount and Fayetteville during the next three hours. I enjoy lying in bed and watching a lone star far out in the heavens while imagining being able to use it for navigation. A brief stop in the middle of nowhere at 10:03pm deserves a check of my scanner, and I hear the engineer advising the dispatcher that as we approached, a signal dropped down—that is, changed from a clear proceed signal to a stop signal. The dispatcher advises that a freight ahead of us had experienced the same problem, and within two minutes we resume at restricted speed until reaching the next signal.

It occurs to me that, until this brief stop, we have traveled nonstop for almost six hours. Freight activity is certainly lighter than it was on the northbound run! I note our arrival in Florence SC at 11:17pm, where the operating crew changes, but drift off to sleep before we depart. When I awaken at 6:20am, we are passing Yukon, a siding on the south side of Jacksonville. As far as I can tell, we have made a nonstop trip with the exception of the brief signal snafu and the Florence crew change.

The continental breakfast finds our smooth sailing continuing, and we arrive at the Sanford terminal 20mins early at 8:40am after a 14-min stop north of the station to unhook the auto carriers. The Sanford Auto Train yard is choked with equipment today, including equipment that will be needed during peak periods, the *Sunset Limited* which has been annulled due to Hurricane Georges and the *Florida Fun Train*, which went out of business while we were away. Soon the auto carriers are shoved onto their unloading tracks and the process of claiming vehicles begins. This time our luck is not quite so good, as we wait about 50mins for our car, but at least we weren't last.

Whether one is a train fan or simply a tourist, the Auto Train offers an excellent alternative to two full days of driving in each direction. Without a doubt, it is Amtrak" best train in the East, as it is both popular and well-managed. Where else can a person travel in comfort while towing his automobile along behind him? As Auto Train wraps up 25 years of good service (after subtracting two years on sabbatical) it may be worth wondering whether the time is ripe for similar services in other parts of the country.

Happy Holidays!

The staff of Rail Travel News wishes you and yours the happiest of holiday seasons and fine train riding in the coming year!

A second Blue Train was to begin running in South Africa on Dec 11. The new train is to have an African theme. For the inaugural run, a large number of heads of state of African nations were to travel together on the train leaving Johannesburg's Park Station. These included leaders of Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Swazi-land, Zimbabwe and perhaps others. The two-day journey of Blue Train II was consid-ered to an historical trip because of the presence of all these leaders. The original Blue Train is considered to be the most luxurious train in the world, and its new version should be similarly regarded. The journey takes the train from Johannesburg to Victoria Falls.

The 1998 NEC Thanksgiving program produced improved results over the same period last year. From 11/23/ thru 11/30, In Station Ticket Sales were up 4% with revenue up 8%. Mechanical Bad Order ratio was at its lowest levels enabling the NEC to offer 18,000 additional seats with the assistance of leased equipment which resulted in 30% less standees this year.

The Empire Service Product Line had the most significant jump in On Time Performance with a November result of 81.9% as opposed to the previous month's 72%. Top OTP performer in November was the Philadelphia Product Line with 92.5%. NortheastDirect reported 89.8% and Metroliners reported 89.1%.

Waiting For the Train

By Tim Lynch

Early afternoon here in south Florida. Just west of me the northbound Silver Meteor and Star have already departed on their journeys to Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan. The southbound Silver Palm is in its Hialeah home being prepared for its next run north. The southbound Silver Star and Meteor are also working their way home.

Much more important than that.. and frequently lost in the often scholarly missives are the real stories. Students and servicemen and women are traveling. A few are going home, as I did thirty years ago, from a place far away. People travel in sadness and joy, to reunions, for holidays and final farewells. Often hopeful, fearfully sad at times, still the steel rails take them home.

Amtrak has been around for a little more than a generation now, sometimes providing a journey that will be remembered for longer than a generation. There's a good chance tonight that a child on the Empire Builder will see the Aurora, the shimmering "northern lights" for the first time. Other journeys...other people.

Have you ever noticed anyone writing a letter aboard an American train? If you haven't, you haven't heard the song of steel on steel long enough. Pen to paper in the Viewliner, or the Superliner. The one in the corner of the club car... next to the girl with her nose in a book..

From city to town... generations have ridden on the trains.

Recent articles and books act as if Amtrak is still waiting for their first passenger to board. The Wall Street Journal rants about so many billions spent. Nothing is said of the passengers, the children, the summer trip to the lake, or the solitude or comfort that such a journey can provide.

More than a generation of steel wheel rolling on steel rail. I think they are probably still a larger operation than TWA. If no one wanted the trains anymore... why are the politicians so afraid to let them go?

The cold hard fact is; The American people want their trains. It's driven into the American minds from the Civil War through the "Belle Epoch" of rail earlier in our now fading century. America will have its trains. The bigger question is; Who will run them on time?

Amtrak yesterday, Amtrak today, and Amtrak tomorrow.

Down here, someone's spreading sheets on a Viewliner bed, as a dining car is being stocked for the next northbound run. People wait at the station, make reservations, and examine unfamiliar timetables. Happy people, sad people. They are still here.. waiting for the train.

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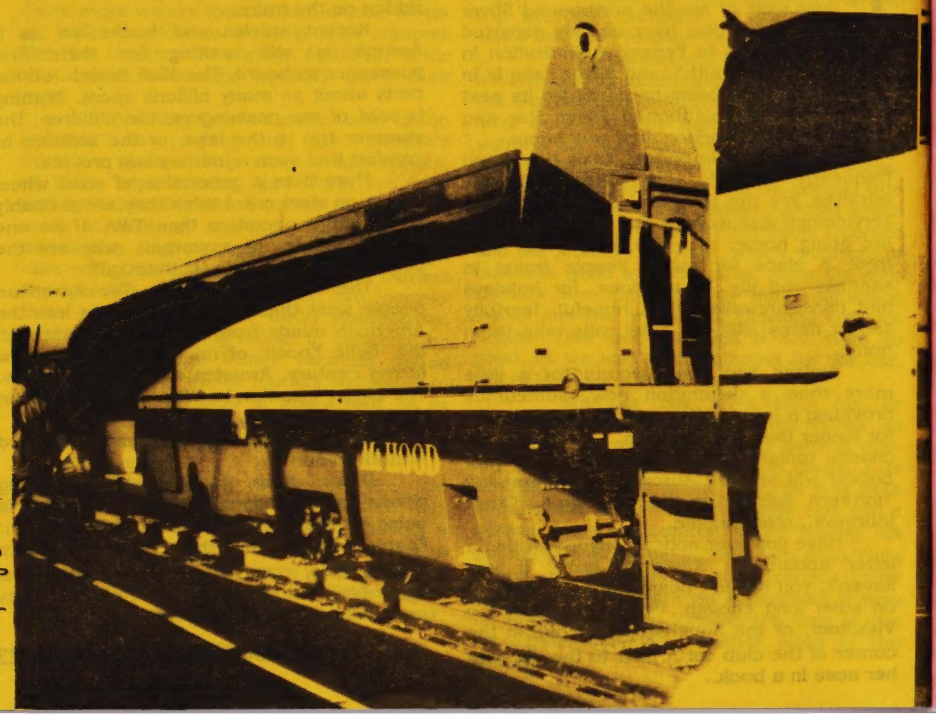

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RTN announces a new video!

Exotic Visitors.

The fast trains visit California. The X2000 and the ICE Train in their Northern Calif. demonstration runs. Also the Fastrak demo with new Metrolink equipment, plus steam.

This video covers the following rail events:

* The X2000 run Oakland-Salinas round trip, trackside and on-board scenes, cab ride on SP's curving line between San Jose and Salinas.
* The German ICE Train visits San Francisco. Trackside and on-board films San Francisco to San Jose.
* The SP's Fastrak demonstration of proposed commuter service Oakland to Martinez and beyond. Trackside and on-board films of brand new borrowed Metrolink equipment.
* A surprise ending: steam excursion leaves Berkeley CA with Daylight-painted cars, dome and observation. Hear the steam whistle meld into an Amtrak horn as a San Joaquin train meets the steam train! Just a lucky scene—we couldn't have done this if we had planned it!

Total video approx. 50 minutes. Full color and natural sound.
Price only $20.00 includes postage in U.S. and any relevant tax!
Write: Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.
Just say: Send me the "Exotic Visitors" video.

Free Video With Your Subscription!

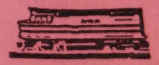
With your 3-year new, renewal or gift subscription to Rail Travel News, you can have a free copy of RTN's "home video", "Rails of California, Vol. One".

This video has some flaws, but it's the only film we'll ever have of the SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS, shot in 1991 a few weeks before this unusual train's discontinuance.

When we receive your remittance of only $69 for 72 issues (a bargain in itself!), plus $3 for shipping costs, we will mail you this unusual video production.

The video is available in VHS size only. It is 33 minutes in duration, in color and natural sound. An especially interesting feature of the film is a variety of wonderful train horns, including Amtrak, Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS, and SP maintenance of way equipment. On the 49ER you'll see the company's own domes and rebuilt bi-level commuter cars as well as leased AMERICAN-EUROPEAN EXPRESS cars.

Don't delay—write now!



Contents of video:

- SIERRA 49ER EXPRESS
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- SAN JOAQUINS
- SANTA FE AND SOUTHERN PACIFIC FREIGHT AND MAINTENANCE OF WAY EQUIPMENT
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